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Review

BRIAN J. YATES, *The Other Abyssinians: The Northern Oromo and the Creation
of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1913*

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beneficial for Ethiopianists as an easy way to keep track of all the different research areas that are being pursued by the project members. This is clearly intended chiefly as a summary of an ambitious and multidisciplinary project that will no doubt significantly contribute to our knowledge of the site, so one looks forward to reading the final report.

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BRIAN J. YATES, *The Other Abyssinians: The Northern Oromo and the Creation of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1913*, Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora, 85 (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020). ix, 236 pp. Price: \$110.00 (Hardcover). ISBN: 978-1-5804-6980-7.

A picture of emperor Mənilək II (r.1889–1913) and his first heir to the throne, the boy Wäsänsäggäd who died young, as well as a group of barefooted military men around them, glosses the cover page of this book. Loaned from the Massillon Museum, the image was taken in 1903, it says, about a decade before the monarch's death, with which the book also ends. Brian Yates' *The Other Abyssinians* attempts to study the complexity of identity in Ethiopian politics in this period, i.e., the second half of the nineteenth century. From the outset, the author states, '[i]n Ethiopia, it is not that ethnicity does not exist, it is just that religion, territory, and culture supersede ethnic categories in lived experiences and interactions' (p. 3). And from the beginning, this ambition is commendable; Yates is concerned with the interpretation of Ethiopian history in academia and how it has *actually* unfolded, contending that they are quite different. In addition, he is concerned with the place that the region of Wällo (in central and northern Ethiopia) held in the country's complicated past.

Yates suggests that there have been two main ways of understanding Ethiopian history: the Semitic view and the Oromo-centric view. In contrast, what he tries to do is present an alternative approach that bridges these two. While the Semitists suggest Ethiopian history is mostly the story of the Amhara and Təgre (he uses Təgrəñña to mean this), and at times the Agäw as attached to the Aksumite dynasty (p. 6), the Oromo-centric view suggests a special place of an Oromo unit which was repeatedly pushed out of power, marginalized, and even colonized (p. 8). Developed out of a PhD thesis and based on a large corpus of primary and secondary sources, as well as interviews, *The Other Abyssinians* is written to show that the Oromo were as much a part of Ethiopian politics and history, and this is done with two effects: Yates demonstrates how 'northern' Ethiopia had developed an inclusionary political system, while also crediting the northern Oromo (those from current day Wällo) for their contribution to Ethiopian politics and cultures.

The book's main chapters explore the cultural backgrounds of Ethiopia since the 1600s, discussing how marriage allowed for the mixing of different linguistic groups; the history of Wällo, its rulers' Oromo heritages, and their power over monarchs during the Era of Princes; Mənilək's unification of Šäwa; the place of Ras Gobäna (an Oromo general) in the expansion of the Ethiopian empire of the day; and the place Wällo and its rulers (namely *Ras Mika'el*) played in the years leading up to the Battle of 'Adwa in 1896, and afterwards. Yates understands the crucial place Wällo plays not just in Ethiopian history and the complexity in identity present there but also in contemporary political debates about ethnicity, since Wällo's ethnic and linguistic diversities pose difficulties to essentialisms.

The book sets about defining what 'Habesha' means to the author, in the book used as the equivalent to some existing group of Ethiopians who are Christians and speak Amharic (though not exclusively). It is, however, confusing, as it sometimes feels that the author is suggesting a grand 'Habesha' identity was formed after Mənilək's rise to power (p. 51) or after the battle of Adwa in 1896 (p. 85)? In addition, the words Abyssinia and Ethiopia are also used liberally by the author, though Yates claims to use terms and definitions used by Ethiopians and not those brought from the outside (p. viii). Further, though Yates eschews the use of essentialist ethnic terms, he does use them throughout the book, indicating the level of difficulty in navigating Ethiopia's complicated history.

In addition to these questions, the book was in need of editorial support for a thorough editing of misplaced sentences, dubious transliterations, as well as unexplained and confusing nomenclature. For instance, Yates uses the hardly ever used Christian name of Mənilək II to refer to him (p. 2), and at other moments writes such things as Haylä Maryam Mənilək and *Ras Mika'el Yoḥannəs* (p. 85), intending to show that Mənilək and Yoḥannəs (IV, r.1871–1889) were godparents to Haylä Maryam and Mika'el, respectively. Such naming conventions, however, are alien to Ethiopian Christians. Beyond such questions though, Yates also suggests sometimes that there are limited sources for certain historical events, such as the council of Boru Meda (p. 83), though no Ethiopian sources have made the list in the endnotes for this claim. Mengistu Lemma's biography of his father is one that immediately comes to mind.¹ In addition, a certain Šayḥ Hussein Ğəbril is mentioned as advisor to king Mika'el (p. 91), though no sources are provided, and no explanations given as to who the author means by this. This Šayḥ is

¹ Mängəstu Lämma [= Mengistu Lemma], መጽሐፈ ገዝታ ዘአለቃ ለግ ኃይሉ ወልደ ታሪክ (*Māṣḥafā təzzəta zä'Alāqa Lämma Ḥaylu Wäldä Tarik*, 'Book of memories of Alāqa Lämma Ḥaylu Wäldä Tarik') (Addis Abāba: Addis Abāba Yunivärsiti Pres, 2003 EC = 2010/2011 CE).

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believed to be legendary, a man who composed prophetic poetry about events spanning some two hundred years, including even 1990s Ethiopian politics. Another such example is the claim of the superiority of Italian firearms at 'Adwa (p. 27), which is simply not true. There are also debatable ideas such as Yates's claim that 'in terms of identity formation [...], Ethiopian sources [...] give scholars a window into how African societies might have produced modern national communities if left alone' (p. 4), which is a romantic reading of a specific period of Ethiopian history shaped by far-sighted rulers of various backgrounds. Yet, we must ask, are there any societies that are ever 'left alone'?

Despite the questions and doubts concerning the conceptual lenses adopted and some of the interpretations presented in the book, *The Other Abyssinians* has the potential to reorient how we think of Ethiopian history. Furthermore, it is a book that brings to light historical facts that challenge historical readings based on essentialized ethnic identities of past Ethiopians. By attempting to show the intricate relationship between political alliances, marriages, land-tenure, and a throne that was practically open to all contestants—barring religious diversities—Yates has taken a major step for us all and serves as an inspiration for further work. An expansion of his effort to southern Ethiopian history along the same lines not being the only one.

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NICOLA CAMILLERI, *Staatsangehörigkeit und Rassismus: Rechtsdiskurse und Verwaltungspraxis in den Kolonien Eritrea und Deutsch-Ostafrika (1882–1919)*, Global Perspectives on Legal History, 19 (Frankfurt am Main: Max Planck Institute for Legal History and Legal Theory, 2021). xiv, 297 pp. Price: €23.94. ISBN: 978-3-944773-36-0.

The distinction between colonizer and colonized is a fundamental element of the colonial order. In most colonies, a dual legal system developed for this purpose. As legal subjects, colonized individuals did not belong to the legal system of the imperial metropolis; rather, they were subject to the arbitrary provisions of 'native law', such as the 'Code de l'indigénat' in the French colonial empire.

In his dissertation, submitted to the Freie Universität Berlin ('Free University of Berlin') in 2017 and published in 2021, Nicola Camilleri examines the legal discourses and practices in which the status and rights of individuals in the Italian colony of Eritrea and the German colony of German East Africa were negotiated and codified with regard to their nationality. This had a profound impact on both the colonized and the colonizers and was characterized by colonial racist discrimination.